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### Over 100,000 Students Take Statewide Annual EPAS Assessment

BATON ROUGE - More than 100,000 Louisiana students are currently participating in an assessment program designed to help students better prepare to meet their educational and career goals. ACT's Educational Planning and Assessment System, or EPAS, is being administered statewide to eighth- and tenth-grade students in public schools that volunteered to participate in the program. The assessment given to eighth graders is called *Explore*. The tenth-grade version of the assessment is called *Plan*.

Both assessments, sponsored by the Louisiana Board of Regents, include academic and career sections and serve as effective tools to help students, parents and educators identify student career interests, academic strengths and weaknesses and the educational efforts and foundation necessary to meet their career goals. EPAS measures achievement in English, mathematics, science and reasoning. The assessment also includes a student interest inventory, which helps students, parents and counselors better understand how a student's abilities and interests can be matched with college curricula and, ultimately, career opportunities.

"We have a vested interest in the preparation and progress of all students," said Louisiana Commissioner of Higher Education Joe Savoie. "As we move toward new admissions standards in Louisiana's four-year institutions, programs like EPAS become critical in providing the information necessary to advise students, parents and teachers on areas which need to be addressed."

The EPAS program offers an array of benefits for students, parents, counselors and participating schools. First and foremost, going over EPAS assessment results offers a great opportunity for parents to sit down and talk to their children about college and career planning.

"It's very important that students receive academic and career information in the eighth grade so they and their parents can put together a four-year high school course plan that will prepare them for college and for work," said Carolyn Kostelecky, Southwest Region Manager for ACT.

Participating *schools* also stand to gain from the EPAS program. By taking part in the program, schools satisfy an important component of a five-year career portfolio requirement. Moreover, EPAS is an early predictor of success on spring accountability tests such as the LEAP assessment. In fact, ACT is creating a correlation report based on last year's EPAS results which should prove valuable to EPAS participating schools desiring to improve accountability scores. In addition, students' academic interests can be shared with colleges and universities, making EPAS a valuable recruiting tool.

“We fully expect the EPAS assessment to become an integral part of Louisiana’s ongoing education reform effort,” Savoie said. “I am pleased that so many schools have volunteered to once again be a part of this effort.”

Last year, the state’s first year to administer the EPAS assessment, more than 85,000 Louisiana eighth- and tenth-grade students participated. The Board of Regents decided to offer use of the ACT instruments because of a statewide effort to raise academic standards for college admission through the *Master Plan for Public Postsecondary Education*. This year, the EPAS assessment is being administered and managed by individual school teams, composed of principals, teachers and counselors, to ensure that students and schools take maximum advantage of the opportunities the assessment provides. EPAS is being coordinated with the efforts of other similarly-oriented statewide educational initiatives, including the TRIO programs at Louisiana’s postsecondary institutions and the recently-launched LA GEAR UP program for secondary schools. Testing began in October and will continue through November. Results of the 2002 EPAS assessment are expected early next year.